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Stone Structures.

Our Kentish Sacred Stones.

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The White Horse Stone

and its Legend.

ILLUSTRATED.

BY F. J. Bennett, F.G.S.

H. C. H. OLIVER, PRINTER, WEST MALLING.

July 25th, 1907.

Sacred Stone Structures.

Our Kentish Sacred Stones.

THE WHITE HORSE STONE AND ITS LEGEND.

Mega-lithic or great-stone structures are of world-wide distribution.* To us they have come from the East, and we may trace their distribution, taking the nearest country to us, from France, where we have the renowned Carnac, which, when complete, must have had some 12,000 stones arranged in eleven rows and ten avenues, and from the Channel Islands, where many fine structures were once to be seen, and some still remain.

They range in Great Britain from Kent, on South-east, to Devon, Cornwall, Wales, the Lake District, Scotland and Ireland, and seem to occur in proximity to the sea and other waters. The oldest of these, such as our Kits Coty and Coldrum, are all of unhewn stones, and they comprise circles, chambered structures, and single stones called mono-liths.

The stones used are those of the locality, though Stonehenge also comprises some foreign stones, brought apparently from a great distance.

* For fuller information on Sacred Stones and Megaliths see chapter vii. on Megaliths in my recently published "Ightham : the Story of a Kentish Village," published by Homeland Association, London, or Ruck, Maidstone.

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In chalk areas the stone is that known as the Sarsen, and the occurrence of the structures would seem to be governed by the occurrence of the Sarsens on the surface of the chalk.

The origin of the name Sarsen is uncertain. They are merely hardened masses of once loose sand that overlaid the chalk, and the washing away of this sand, and in some cases that of the softer chalk, has left behind these hard and insoluble masses of stone.

They are sometimes of great size, as at Stonehenge, and the largest weigh some 70 tons, though none of our Kentish ones approach this, and ten tons would be the top weight here, and very rarely that. Their flat, tabular nature, intense hardness, and surface occurrence, render them just the stone fitted for such sacred structures, in which hard, unhewn masses of stone are the essential features.

They seem confined in Kent to a very small area, and there may possibly be a geologic reason for this.

This area is bounded by Addington, Coldrum, Harvel and Meopham on the West, by the Countless Stones, Kits Coty, Horsted and Cobham on the East, at least it is within that area that all the well-known examples occur.

These structures originated from the East, where they may date back to 5,000 B.C., and

arrived here at latest 2,000 B.C. In that long process of travel to us in the West, change, induced by time, clime, custom and topography, must naturally have caused them to lose much of their original meaning at the time of introduction here, so no wonder that we of to-day, and especially those of the latest or of the electric generation, if I may use that term, almost utterly fail to grasp their meaning, and much therefore is left to mere conjecture as to what this may have been.

The difficulty too of understanding, is increased by the fact that they are not as they were left, but have been more or less mutilated, and some have been entirely removed so that we have not all the structural evidence before us, and some essential parts may in many cases be missing.

Still we can, in a measure, by putting together the evidence available, gain a very fair idea of the original plan.

But this paper is mostly concerned with one stone only, viz., the White Horse Stone, and yet its story is not so simple as its name would imply.

White Horses of apparently pre-historic date, cut in the turf of the chalk Downs, are well known, and the Berkshire White Horse of Uffington is the best example, and remains very much as first cut, but others, like the one at Bratton, have been re-cut within the last 100 years, and it is said that the

position has been reversed, and others again have been destroyed.

These horses are always connected with battles with invaders, usually Danish, and are meant as Emblems of Victory. Whether we ever had a White Horse cut through the turf to the chalk on the Down close by is not known, but our Kentish Downs are here so much wooded now, owing to the clay soil that caps the chalk, that they may have been too wooded then, to have made the carving out of a horse conspicuous enough to have been sufficiently visible, and so the stone in question was perhaps at the time of the Battle of Aylesford pressed into the service, and called the White Horse Stone; the field to the East is known as the White Horse Field.

It must, however, be stated that horses here go back to pre-historic times, and at least as far back as the Cave period in late Paleolithic times, say the middle part of the Stone Age period, and they must have been largely used for food then, as the immense number of their bones found in the cave deposits testify. Spirited sketches, too, of horses exist carved on bones with the flint graver of the period. The horse plays a most important part in myth and fable, and we hear of mythical horses of wonderful speed and endurance.

The horse was the symbol of victory, and we can find proof of this in our Bibles. So that it seems quite as it should be that we find our White

Horse Stone associated with the Battle of Aylesford, 445 A.D., though as we have seen it is almost certainly far older than that date.

Then we have mythical animals, half beast and half human, such as the Centaur, half man and half horse, the man-headed winged Bull of the Assyrians, the story of Europa and the Bull, &c., and coming to our Kentish White Stone we here find the association of the human and the animal, and no one to whom I have pointed this out has failed to see the human face on the one side, and the fish-like face on the other.

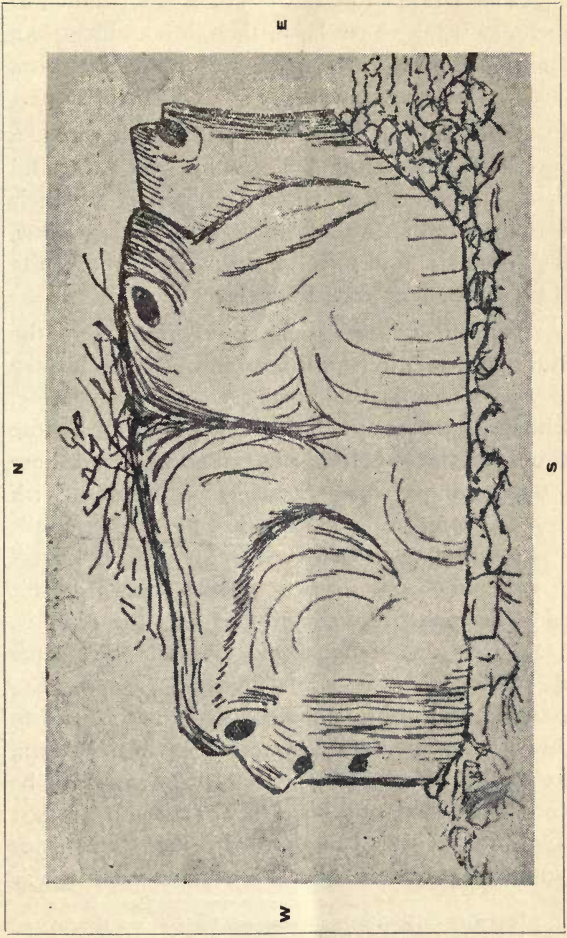
Dissimilar in this way as this stone is from the others it is also unlike them in standing alone, but on the other hand is in close association with them, being only half a mile due east of the Countless Stones, and a short distance south of the Dolmen, like Kits Coty, removed in 1822, and which was due west of it.

Not only does the south view of this stone show two faces in profile, but at either end, in the thickness of the stone, are two full faces, the eyes in each case being due to two natural holes that run right through the thickness of the stone.

There has been some rude but effective dressing of the stone over the eyes to bring out the forehead, and some other chipping to bring out the remarkable western human face, seen in profile, well deserving, I think, the name suggested, viz., that of the Western Sphinx.

West End and Profile Views, from Photographs by Mr. H. Elgar, of the Maidstone Museum.

These blocks are reproduced from my article on the White Horse Stone,



View from a Sketch by Mr. F. J. Bennett, showing the profiles on the South Side.

by the courtesy of the Proprietors of the "South Eastern Gazette."

The Druids too, if the stone was known to them, as it may have been, though far older than their time, may have pressed it into their service, but that does not constitute it a Druidical stone.

Tradition, as before said, allots to this stone a part in the battle of Aylesford, in 445 A.D., and there it is said Hengist and Horsa set up their Standard with the device of the prancing horse, their emblem, and perhaps the name of the White Horse Stone may date from that time.

But all we seem to have inherited from the dim and mysterious past that shrouds the history of this stone, is the name White Horse Stone, which seems associated, as above stated, with those almost mythical heroes, Hengist and Horsa, whose totem, perhaps, was a horse. In connection with this it is interesting to note that as late as 1865 it was the custom in Denmark to decorate the roofs of their houses with two wooden horses heads, and when asked the meaning of this the reply is, "Oh, they are Hengist and Horsa."* We have also adopted this white horse, in a prancing attitude, as the Arms of Kent, and have affixed to this the somewhat mysterious word Invicta, concerning which very little certain seems to be known, all that one hears is that it means that Kent was neither conquered by the Romans or Normans, and from this circumstance Kent in war

* Brewer, in his Dictionary of Phrase and Fable, derives Hengist from Ger.: hengst=a horse, and Horsa from A.S.: hors=a horse, so that they *both mean horse*, a derivation and conclusion that had also occurred to me.

time claimed a right to lead the van of the army, a right often claimed and conceded. The explanation of this may arise from the fact that the great Forest of Anderida* formed a natural bulwark, which greatly aided its intrepid defenders in holding their own against all comers for many centuries.

THE LEGEND OF THE KENTISH WHITE HORSE OR THE WESTERN SPHINX.

To the Sphinx.

Lone Guardian of the Pilgrims' Road,
High on hill-side is thy abode!
Four thousand years may be thy age,
What saw? what heard? oh, centuried Sage,
We guess, but may not know.

From these scanty materials I have ventured to construct a legend, dating back to the time when the first recorded invasion took place, viz., that of the Romans.

This event must have caused great consternation among the Britons, and we may fancy the Druids assembling in solemn conclave to discuss the serious situation, and perhaps deciding in their difficulty to consult their oracle, "The Western Sphinx," the other name suggested for the White Horse Stone.

We must try then to imagine the Druids
Episode 1 meeting to consult their oracle, when the Sphinx

* It is said that William I. on meeting the Saxon army, bearing by the order of their General, *boughs of trees over their shoulders*, made a treaty with Kent, and so that County was not conquered and remained Invicta.

replies that the salvation of Kent depends on a White Horse, leaving it as is usual in these cases, to the Druids to settle what this may mean. They decide that it must refer to a well-known white horse in a certain herd that has hitherto eluded capture, and that a further attempt must
Episode 2 be made. This is done and fails, as before.

This failure causes them again to consult the Sphinx. This time they have a more explicit answer, and are told that the Arch-Druid must go to the Herd, and summon by trumpet-call Invictus,*
Episode 3 and tell him that if he will consent to go in a war chariot with his favourite mare, and lead a charge against the Romans this will be successful, after which he can go back to the Herd. And to this end the Sphinx has endowed the horse with the power both to understand and to utter human speech.

All happens as the Sphinx foretells. Invictus
Episode 4 consents to enter the chariot, and he leads the attack. The charge is completely successful. The Roman legions are broken, and they retire from
Episode 5 Kent. Invictus is then publicly thanked, a laurel wreath is placed round his neck, and he is conducted in triumph back to the Herd. And here endeth the first part of the Legend of the Kentish White Horse.

The following verses on the five episodes of the legend are meant to be descriptive of five pictures to illustrate these. Mr. Frank Cowley,

* This is the name I have given to the White Horse, regarding Invicta the feminine form, as a later one, out of compliment to Kent perhaps.

the Barber-Artist of Boro' Green, has completed episodes 2 and 4, and they were on view at Mr. Gegan's Art Exhibition during the Cricket Week, and he hopes to complete the series.

Episode 1.

INVOCATION OF THE SPHINX.

Mark the Druids, solemn, slow,
In mystic circle thrice they go,
Downward bend, their faces veil,
Await the voice's fateful wail
Attend its message dread.

Episode 2.

THE FAILURE TO CAPTURE INVICTUS.

Proud milk-white steed, King of the Herd,
Brave as the pard, swift as the bird,
Snapped is thy would-be captor's rope,
Unconquered for all time we hope
Ever remain Invictus.

Episode 3.

THE SUMMONING OF INVICTUS.

Invictus! peals the trumpet's call,
Responds with thrilling neigh,
Gallops, appears before them all,
Nor hesitates he to obey,
His County Kent to save.

Episode 4.

THE HARNESSING OF INVICTUS: HE STOOPS TO CONQUER.

Brave Kentish steed, too long on prance
'Gainst Roman foe, advance! advance!
Broken beneath thy chariot's shock,
Like lightning-splintered shattered rock
Right truly dubbed Invictus.

Episode 5.

The Thanking of, and Return of Invictus to the Herd.

Brave laurelled steed, our victor-horse,
Deep thanked by one and all,
Back to his Herd, he bends his course;
Long life may him befall.
Kent ever Invicta be.

F. J. Bennett.

I am indebted to Mr. Elgar, of the Museum, Maidstone, for these notes:

WHITE HORSE.

[Extract from 'Regal Armorie of Great Britain,' B. A. Brunet, p 121].

The White Horse of Odin, 440-450.

Horsa derived his name from Horsens, his native town in Jutland, whence he had adopted for his ensign the war-horse of Odin.

Hengist erected a tomb to his brother in the field where he was killed. That land fell into the share of the Saxons, who built thereon a mansion, together with a farm or hamlet, which took the name of Horsa's Ham. This ham became a chatellany, and at last the town of Horsham (in Sussex).

The ambling horse of Odin, being hoisted by Hengist, was set up as the standard of Duroverum, a city newly conquered by the Jutes, which received the name of Cantor-bury, or Canterbury, and became the capital of the kingdom of Kent, of which Hengist was the first king.

The horse rampant, an attitude known as the canter, or Canterbury gallop, has been ever since the ensign of the County of Kent.

According to Verstegan, the Wapen, or armorial bearing of Hengist, was a white horse in the act of rearing, or *Hengist* in a red field: Ireland's 'History of Kent.'

A white horse was the standard of Cerropia, a city of Greece, founded by Cerrops, the chief of an Egyptian colony.

This badge recalled that the finest white horse had been brought by sea from Egypt into Greece.

Hence the tradition of the White Horse arriving by sea was arranged into a sacred pedigree, of which here is the substance:—"Neptune created a white war horse to endow Athenes. This swift animal was given to Mars, the God of War, *for the defence of the Country* and the standard of Attica."

Another friend gives me this note:

Bede [Eccles. Hist.] says that Horsa was slain in battle by the Britons, and buried in East Kent, where a monument bearing his name existed at the time of his writing. But Bede is not always trustworthy.

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